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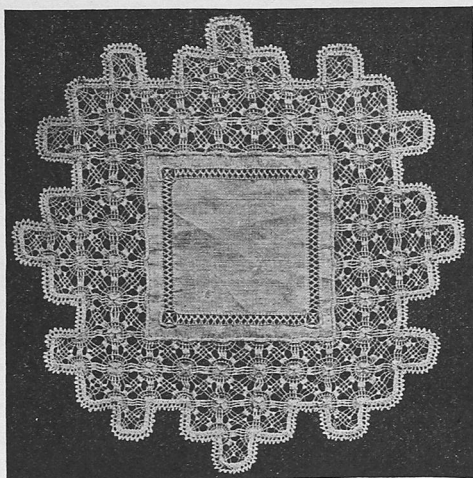
DECORATIVE TEXTILE FABRICS

MEXICAN DRAWN-WORK.

BY MRS. S. A. BROCK-PUTNAM.



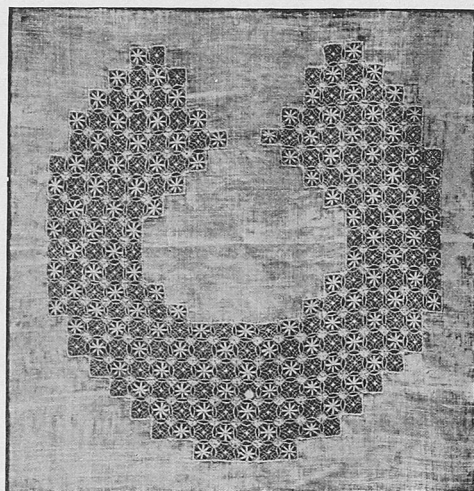
IN reviewing the possible history of the *punto tirato*, or what is now better known as "Mexican drawn-work," we find ourselves at a loss for a starting point, or to what people to attribute its inception as a feminine handicraft. In tracing the origin of embroidery, as of most of the refinements of life which have been handed down to the present time, we are carried back to the East and to early stages of civilization, and it is reasonable to suppose that the *punto tirato* is the outgrowth of an idea in flourishing work which antedates any accredited record. "Fine twined linen" we know was used in the priestly garments of the time of Moses and Aaron. Who can tell but that the "cunning work" mentioned in connection may have furnished a suggestion, that in the course of years, found development in drawn-work, or but that, indeed, the drawing of the threads was a preliminary step to the work which enriched the sacred vestments? In the darning which enters into the drawn-work of the present we find a close resemblance to old Persian embroidery, especially in the varieties of drawn-work done by the women of the Russian peasantry, and the women of the Azores and the Philippine Islands, and other of the Portuguese and Spanish dependencies.



DOILY IN MEXICAN DRAWN-WORK.

But whether it came down through the Moors or the Castilians, or how it came to take so firm root among the women of Spanish and Portuguese descent, or how it reached England prior to the Reformation, it is somewhat difficult to imagine. It is certain from the specimens of it which have been exhumed

from barrows (in which, with several remarkable and interesting varieties of laces, it has been found after having been buried for centuries) that it existed in the old days of monasticism, and was the work of the early English nuns. Among the ancient treasures shown in the house of Anne Hathaway, at Stratford-on-Avon, by Mrs. Baker, a descendant of the



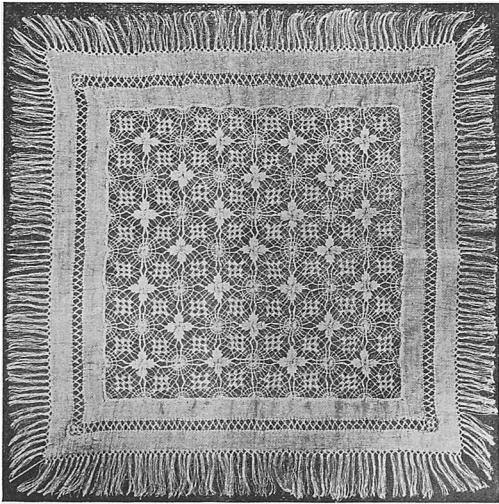
YOKE FOR INFANT'S ROBE IN MEXICAN DRAWN-WORK.

Hathaway family and the present custodian of the cottage in which Will Shakespeare wooed and won his bride, are the sheets and other pieces of linen used on the occasion of the Shakespeare, and other bridals in the family, ornamented in drawn-work. And it existed early in our own country, handed down, without doubt, from our English ancestresses. Appearing in its simplest form in what is styled "hem-stitching"—the hem on any article being effected by the drawing of a few threads, and from three to four (or a greater number) of the threads being caught up on the needle, secured by a second stitch to the fold, which is closely basted above, so as to make a perfectly straight line for the hem—from the hem-stitch, very much more elaborate effects were produced. As a rule these pieces of work, effected by drawing the threads of the linen only in one direction, took on a resemblance to insertion; but in the course of time the drawing was checkered, and however derived, whether by successful experiment, the needle or from instruction (from some woman of Spanish descent, perhaps), American women produced intricate and elaborate pieces of drawn-work.

It is to the women of Mexico, however, and chiefly to the peasantry of the country, that the palm must be accorded for the most successful accomplishments in this beautiful and remarkable variety of needlecraft. Educated to it from infancy, it becomes an exercise of their domestic life, rather than a mere accomplishment, so that in it, whatever may be

said of the work of our American amateurs, they are unrivaled. There is scarcely a cottage in Mexico which has not among its women a proficient in drawn-work. Until old enough to handle the needle skillfully, the young girls are set to drawing the threads in the linen, and by degrees they are taught all the intricacies of the work.

The linen employed is from that of the coarse and heavy texture sometimes seen in table scarfs, to the finest lawn devoted to ladies' handkerchiefs. It is best when linen of fine quality and close texture is used that it should be of firm, round thread, as the textile of this description is more easily drawn



NAPKIN FOR TEA TABLE IN MEXICAN DRAWN-WORK.

than is the flat and loosely spun. The drawing of the threads constitutes a very important portion of the work; and to facilitate the drawing of the thread some workers first wash the linen in the suds of white soap, permitting it to dry unrised—a preliminary step never taken, it is said, by a Mexican woman. The threads are drawn and the hem secured by hem-stitching, if the piece is to be hemmed, the linen is then stretched in a light wooden frame, when the special design is entered upon. It would be well-nigh impossible specifically to describe the various designs wrought.

An ambition on the part of these workers is to originate new stitches, or designs; and these in any cases evolved, a levee of sister-embroiderers is said to be always the result, the happy discoverer fêted by her envious co-laborers, crowned with flowers and honored in every manner coming within the range of the limited possibilities of the people and their surroundings. Not only are the women of Mexico, who are trained in their art, said to be fond of this work, but when they can procure good materials, which is not always possible with them, they exhibit the delight that every true artist must feel when he has at hand the means for the best endeavor of his craft. It is then that they apply their ingenuity and their needles with a fresh will, the consequence being added enjoyment of an accomplishment in which they find the greatest delight that comes into their humble existence.

Save a meager livelihood through the natural products of the soil, with many Mexican families the sale of this work furnishes the only means of subsistence. It is not infrequently the case that a whole year is devoted by a worker to a single piece if the material is fine and the design elaborate; and when it is told that the woman feels comparatively rich if she receives as much as a hundred dollars for her *chef d'oeuvre*, were it not that the woman is both proud and happy, we should feel like crying, as does Hood in his "Song of the Shirt"—

"Alas! that bread should be so dear,
And human life so cheap!"

A piece, valued in our market at \$50, which occupied a skilled worker a year, is shown in one of our illustrations, garlands, crosses and baskets of flowers entering into the design.

The most choice specimens of this work are said by Mrs. Criss-Wise (who conducts an agency for the sale of this work in New York) to be done by women whose ages range from 16 to 30 years, and to come from the region about Tamaulipas, Mexico. The entrepot in our country is Brownsville, Texas; and we are now receiving as beautiful pieces of the work as can be obtained anywhere in the country in which it is produced. To the workers in her employment Mrs. Wise furnishes materials from New York, and is authority for pronouncing Coates' spool cotton the very best that can be used in its execution. According to the quality of the linen upon which the work is done, thread from No. 30 to No. 250 is used, the last producing work as delicate as the finest Mechlin lace. There are shown, indeed, a few specimens of this work done wholly of the thread, which is knotted in according to a special design; and this work of the thread alone is doubtless the true *punto tirato*.

Drawn-work now enters largely into bed and table linen—enriching sheets and pillow cases, tea-table covers, napkins, doilies, sideboard and bureau scarfs, towels and handkerchiefs. It also ornaments ladies' underwear and baby linen, and has been known to form the cross on the surplice of an ecclesiastic of the Church of England. For very fine pieces of the work Mrs. Criss-Wise recommends the dainty handspun French linen lawn and Chinese grass linen; with a good word for the machine-made, soft finished linens, of firm round thread, of Irish, French, Dutch and Belgian manufacture. For large pieces and heavier work she commends the "Old Bleach" linens.



CORNER OF TABLE CENTER IN MEXICAN DRAWN-WORK.

DECORATIVE NOTE.

A DINING-ROOM is wainscoted in small panels with cherry, and the wall space above is covered with buff terra-cotta tiles. The dining-room mantel is made especially ornamental by terminating in a richly moulded arch. This is in buff terra-cotta, as is the entire mantel. The mantel-shelf is supported in the center by a corbel with ribs, covered with modeled ornament. At the sides are fluted pilasters in groups of three. The buffet and dressers are built in keeping with the style of the room.

A LIBRARY is wainscoted in light mahogany, and the wall space above is covered with old tapestry. The frieze displays continuous scroll-like forms, and modeled in papier maché, to which is given the tint of Cyprus copper. The mantel is recessed. In the over-mantel a small square window of stained glass is set in the mahogany, which is used as in the wainscoting, but in smaller, bolder squares. The seats are placed in the corners of the recess, which on one side marks the end of the bookshelves and on the other terminates in a pedestal. The recess is marked from above by a perforated screen of wood, cutting across and extending down about two feet and a half.

DECORATING AN UNPRETENTIOUS HOME.

A. ASHMUN KELLY.



WITH unlimited means at one's command, the modern home, under the inspired manipulation of the professional decorator, may be made just what one will as to luxury and beauty; but where money is quite limited, and every dollar a matter of serious moment, and the hired decorative artist entirely out of the question, the problem of home decoration becomes more serious and difficult. Nevertheless, exquisite taste and correct

arrangement are often seen in the more modest abode, just as vulgarity and ultra bad taste are not uncommon in the palatial home. This is an era of household decoration. There are the decorative artist who disposes of estheticism at so much per day, and the woman with hold decoration. Between the two the home beautiful is effected, and who shall say that the wonders wrought by home geni are not productive of more genuine gratification than the most marvelous masterpieces of the professional artist?

VALUE OF COLOR.

The amateur decorator should first realize how serious a thing it is to color a house interior. Color, like climate, influences the emotions, from which spring all our joy or sadness, and thus direction is given to our lives and thoughts. Color, once established, is there for months and years, to confer light and happiness, or gloom and sadness. Winter gives way to summer, but color is unchanging. How important, then, that the color is right in every particular! Moreover, we are to consider that the color which we begin with, that which we put on walls and ceilings, is to govern the coloring of the furnishings, and to give tone to the whole house.

Again, we are to remember that attention must be given to the matters of location of room, purpose of room, the preference of the occupant of room. All these details must be duly considered, just as a general considers beforehand all the factors of numbers, defenses, topography, etc., before attacking his enemy, or as the artist first masses his colors on the canvas before beginning the real delineation of his subject, to get an idea of what the picture is going to be.

THE COTTAGE HOME.

Taking a modest cottage home, which most truthfully represents our American abode to-day, we will accompany the amateur decorator and furnisher through the pleasing work of decorating it. We will suppose that it contains hall, reception room, parlor and dining room and kitchen on first floor, and four bedrooms, occupying corners of the house, and bathroom on second floor. The attic is ceiled, and contains three small rooms, all large enough for a single or even three-quarter bed,

handy to have for a spare bed for hired help and for storage. The wood finish throughout is white pine, which is the most used in American house construction, as being superior to poplar in that it does not warp or change under temperature changes, and better than cheap hardwood, such as chestnut, a coarse, "loud" grained affair, and ash and poor selection of oak. Hardwood is all right when it is right, but the kind that is put into modest homes, and the kind of finish it gets, does not warrant our preference for it. Far better the cheap but satisfactory white pine, with still cheaper yellow pine for floors.

THE HALL.

Once the least thought of, now the principal object of concern, because fairly entitled to such distinction, the hall shall be our first point of attack with paint and brush; for this house is to have no wallpaper anywhere—the next house will enjoy that distinction. Happily, quite artistic little halls come with the modern small house, and it is easy to color and decorate them, because the builder has left us only this to do; oftentimes, you know, the decorator has to build and decorate, both. In our present house as we enter by the front door we come

directly into the hall, which is 9 ft. in width by 17 ft. in length. The fireplace is to the left, and the staircase just opposite. The fireplace is built up of pressed red bricks, the hearth laid in the same. The trimmings of iron are dull black. Over the fireplace is a plain mantel shelf. Around the walls run a wainscoting four feet high, and bordered at top with a plain molding. The wainscot is paneled in irregular panels, to break up the surface. Two square posts flank either side of a platform leading to stairs. The posts have a turned ornament at the top, upon which lamps, made for the purpose, can be placed. A window opens upon this platform, and there is another at the head of stairs, first landing. The floor is of selected yellow pine, and the walls and ceilings are plastered plain, in hard finish.

Taking the only permanent coloring that we find as our keynote, namely, the red of the

fireplace bricks, we will first color the plaster. The ceiling may be painted a warm olive color, care being taken to make it light and cheerful, because all ceilings should be this, and that of the hall forms no exception to the rule. We will not ornament it. The sides, I would like to advise, might be covered with red and greenish-white check china matting above the wainscot. In lieu of this we will paint the space a terra-cotta red; that is, venetian red with some ochre in it, just enough to soften the red, and to make it come near the color of the regulation Philadelphia pressed red brick. Over this surface stencil designs of circular or geometrical character may be laid, sort of haphazard, to be followed up by scrubbing in, with a fitch brush, some liquid bronze. The border or frieze should be a part of the wall decoration, at least so far as ground color is concerned, while the design may be similar or even the same as that of the wall space, but put on more regularly, while two or three gold-bronze lines may be run around top and bottom of frieze. The decorating of wall space can, of course, be omitted, and without leaving an unfinished look. The painting of the woodwork comes

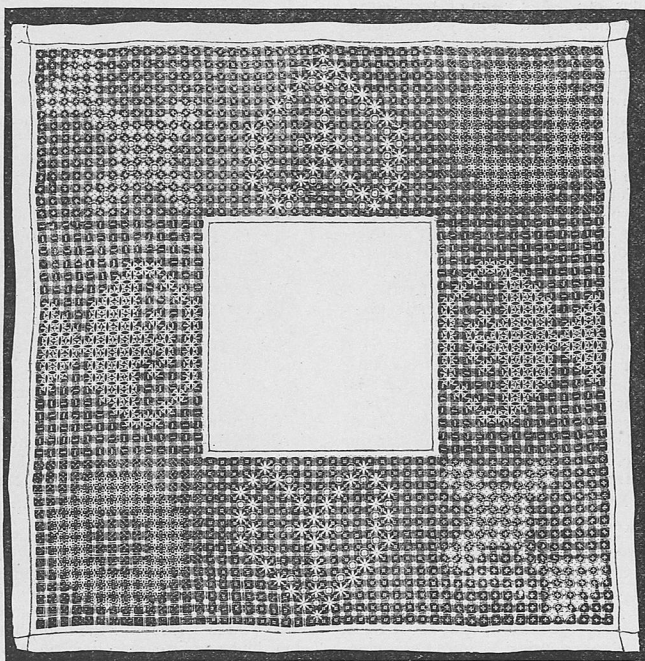


TABLE CENTER PIECE, IN MEXICAN DRAWN-WORK.